



Press Clipping Article

Title: Drought affects wheat crop - Average yield cut in half in Warren County; late planters fared better

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Area agricultural experts say this year's drought has diminished most farmers' wheat yields, but those who planted late received better than expected returns.

The average wheat yield in Warren County is 40 to 50 bushels, which is about half of what farmers normally harvest, said Joanna Coles, Warren's University of Kentucky cooperative extension agent.

Wheat fields planted extremely late realized above average yields, Coles said, but she estimated about 70 percent of Warren's wheat crop was destroyed, as many farmers opted to plant early beans or corn instead due to the drought and an early April freeze that decimated crops.

"It definitely hurt not having rains," she said.

In Logan County, which is second in the state to Christian County in wheat production, bushels have ranged from 35 to 91, according to Chris Milam, Logan's University of Kentucky cooperative extension agent for agriculture.

Although 91 is an above average top range, Milam said this year has been "terrible" for most wheat farmers, as many destroyed crops, not thinking it was worth harvesting.

An average year's range is typically 60 to 80, but most Logan wheat farmers produced between 45 to 60 bushels this year, he said.

However, tobacco, a dry weather crop, has fared well so far this year because it doesn't need a lot of water. Too much moisture can actually cause diseases, he said.

In addition, the drought hurt the corn crop, as much had to be replanted, but last week's timely rains probably saved much of it, Milam said.

Scott Jones of Russellville, part owner of Wheat Tech, an agricultural consulting firm, said

most corn was planted in late March and early April, thus the early April freeze meant about 60 percent to 70 percent of it had to be replanted in southcentral Kentucky.

Jones, who has clients in Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri, said the drought has had a more negative effect to the east. As such, Warren and Simpson counties were hurt more than Logan.

“Overall damage was less the farther west you get,” he said.

Precipitation has been sporadic, leading to dry patches in certain areas. While pastures and hay fields are benefiting from recent rains, the corn crop could have used it about three weeks ago, he said.

“We're certainly not going to turn it down,” Jones added.

He said he's currently focusing his attention on helping farmers with soybeans, a benefactor of last week's rains.

Jones is monitoring weather systems to the south, where Asian Soybean Rust, a disease that affects soybeans and legume crops, is prevalent in Gulf states.

It hasn't yet affected Kentucky farmers, but some was found near Princeton last year, he said. The disease has only been in the country a few years, but its spores can ride with the weather and defoliate fields in a matter of weeks.

Echoing Coles' assessment of late-planted wheat yields, Jones said the crops weathered harsh conditions, with bushel weights being more than acceptable in most cases.

“We were pleasantly surprised. The quality was better than anticipated,” Jones said.

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